

2002 Wetland Reserve Program

Program Focus — FY 2003

Alaska State WRP

A unique venture north of Fairbanks is providing an interesting opportunity to address a private landowner's interest in enhancing and maintaining an important nesting and staging area for ducks, geese and sandhill cranes, while making commercial and military air travel safer for people and birds.

Bird strikes by civilian and military aircraft are dangerous business in the airspace around Fairbanks. Planning is ongoing to assist a local landowner in an effort to enroll his agricultural wetland property, which could help draw flying birds away from busy flight lanes. This 40 acre parcel, in conjunction with nearby state efforts could help relocate resting and rearing areas from airstrips and adjacent ponds, to safer haven for birds. Rather than continue losing farming revenue or selling for residential development, this project will benefit the surrounding area by maintaining and enhancing wetland functions and values through a **WRP** perpetual easement.

NRCS Alaska presents this case as just one of a host of opportunities available to state landowners through program and technical assistance under **WRP**.



Alaska Summary

Overview — In a nation where vanishing wetlands and their widely recognized functions and values have been at great peril for more than 100 years, Alaska may be considered very fortunate for still retaining vast areas of existing natural wetlands. By some written estimates as much as 175 million acres of wetlands still remains productively functioning, providing the many tremendous values for which we know these ecosystems are important.

However, processes of urbanization, infrastructure creation, resource development and even farming are assuredly altering and erasing wetlands from the Alaskan landscape in important geographical areas for humans, fish and wildlife. The functions and values provided historically by these wetlands are being lost at an often-rapid rate. Just as has happened in the lower 48 states, with these changes come loss or deterioration of flood control systems, increased sediment/ erosion, reduced water storage and quality, destruction of fish and wildlife habitat and the loss of the natural filtering effects of these kidneys of the landscape.

Through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), landowners on a voluntary basis are eligible to enroll their property into one of three program categories which can assist them in restoring agriculturally degraded wetlands. Landowners often have very personal reasons for entering land into the program. However, there almost always is the sincere interest of these landowners to return and protect the landscape for their children and future generations, and wildlife.

There are approximately 550 operating agricultural units statewide. Many of these units contain wetlands currently being farmed or as adjacent parcels. Many of these wet sites are expensive to cultivate and do not return agricultural values to offset their management costs. In some cases farming efforts in permafrost areas have not been successful and these sites have deteriorated and become useless as farm ground as well as their original wetland conditions. These sites can be perfect candidates for WRP restoration activities. Land owners may be able to recoup lost income, while functions and values of the area are restored or even enhanced beyond original conditions. And, unique (even by Alaska standards !) features of the restoration can serve important area specific needs.

Partnering — We're The Best ! Alaska's first program participant is engaged in a cooperative effort with partners from the NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This private and public partnership helps ensure that the landowner, as well as the resource, gains the most beneficial considerations possible. Successful project ownership begets lasting and productive relationships.

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It might not look like much in winter, but these happy planners hope to see hundreds of ducks, geese and sandhill cranes on this Alaskan WRP site as the result of a successful project completion.

Alaska Dollars and Contracts by Congressional District

Alaska Dollars and Contracts

Congressional Districts	Fiscal Year 2002		Cumulative Total (97-02)	
	Obligated Dollars	Number of Contracts	Obligated Dollars	Number of Contracts
District 1	0	1*	0	1
State Totals	0	1*	0	1

**UnderDevelopment.*



Restoration of early successional stages of herbaceous wetland habitat is aimed at mimicking natural conditions which would be found in the area. Excavations of shallow water areas in this lowland river delta wetland complex could enhance waterfowl and shorebird staging, rearing and feeding. Photo credit: US Fish and Wildlife Service

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